



Photos: Peter Ede



(606) 'Danger' - 720 x 900mm, Road signs on plywood.  
 FRONT (508) DETAIL: 'One' - 1745 x 690mm, Aluminium road signs on ply

RAFT ARTSPACE PRESENTS

# NO PAINT

RECENT WORK BY PETER QUINN

SHOWING MARCH 10 - APRIL 1 OPENING 6PM FRIDAY MARCH 10

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GALLERY HOURS: 10-5 WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY



**RAFT**  
artspace



(501)  
 'Explosive zone' - 895 x 790mm,  
 Aluminium road signs on ply.



(419)  
 'Diagonals' - 690 x 860mm,  
 Aluminium road signs on ply frame, edged with aluminium angle.



(432)  
 'Bigger Yellow 2' - 1200 x 900mm,  
 Plastic signs on ply frame.

## NO PAINT

All the works in this exhibition are constructions and many are made from old road signs. Collecting the materials can be an adventure - the heat, the dust, the mud, the humidity, retrieving a crumpled sign from a bin full of razor sharp metal. I have no objection to normal art paints but I do relish industrial finishes, especially the saturated colours, the dense blacks and the intense reflections. The allure of the materials in these pieces is that they have their history writ large upon them and that they have persisted even in this, the toughest climate. I don't feel confined to any particular material even though it is often the material - a half destroyed road sign - that moves me in the first place.

The wall is such a good place to look at the way surfaces change with the light. My pieces reward viewing from different angles, different times of day and different seasons. The brightness of some of my work is a direct response to the light I see. Not the romantic gentle tropics but rather the blow torch sun of over exposure - a certain hardness I have come to love. Sometimes I want the tessellated surfaces I construct to evoke huge landscapes. The idea of representing a landscape - a vision, a country - by showing just its simplest elements or bones, is of course deeply influenced by Aboriginal art. Living in Darwin means much of the best art I see is Aboriginal art.

*Peter Quinn - March 2006*

"In NO PAINT, his first solo exhibition, Peter Quinn returns to the place where he began, as a maker of art furniture and sculpture from recycled metal; with a new awareness of himself as a painter with no paint but light itself, reflecting off already painted and weathered surfaces. Some of his constructions live on the wall others sit on the floor but the same awareness of patina, embedded history, the vicissitudes of the climate and the play of fractured living light informs them.

Light is not the only thing at play, language is unleashed and Quinn's considerable spare wit finds expression in these constructions. They secrete puns and meaning slips and slides on the subtly rippled and finely scratched surfaces. The worn pre-painted metal, which he cuts and reconfigures is both the canvas and the paint, the support and the ornamentation; an entirely material thing in and of itself."

*from 'SEE NO PAINT', catalogue essay by SUZANNE SPUNNER, 2006*



(434) 'Wide Screen Cow' - 1500 x 685mm, Aluminium road signs on ply.

## SEE NO PAINT

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In NO PAINT, Peter Quinn has returned to the place where he began, as a maker of art furniture and sculpture from recycled metal with the new awareness of himself as a painter with no paint but light itself reflecting off already painted and weathered surfaces. Some of the work lives on the wall others need to sit on the floor but the same awareness of patina, embedded history, the vicissitudes of the climate and the play of fractured living light informs them.

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The objects he first made and exhibited at 24HR ART in 100% TRACY in 1994 and TABLEAU IMMEUBLAY 1996, were constructed and delineated with metal, drawn as much as welded and the play of light was in the sharp contrast of form and shape seen against and through shadow and light. The other element evident in these first works was wit and language games- Cyclone Settle, exhibited in 100% TRACY - a corrugated iron bench seat set on 1974 Holden Kingswood springs, with a welded steel back curlicued into a wave shape suggestive of a storm surge, played off the contradictions of Settler history in the Top End- settles are customarily made of oak, not corrugated iron; the ubiquitous vernacular Territory building material nor do they rest on that telling marker of suburban aspiration in Darwin in 1974, the Holden Kingswood. Moreover when you sat on it you could create a wobble, as unstable as the jerry built architecture of the place then.

Quinn's work between then and now - his second and third exhibitions - saw him move resolutely to the wall, to confine himself to two dimensions. In ITERATION at RAFT ARTSPACE in 2004, he used multiple found objects - rulers, pencils, tape measures- to create constructed mathematically precise collages, in a homage to his father who had recently died and bequeathed the son, his shed where they had grown up together making stuff. It was the discovery of his father's old tools and tape measures that had made Quinn want to create a memento mori. Formality, a reverence for precision and nostalgia were the tone of ITERATION, wit a mainstay of his earlier work, receded. However the patina of found materials had begun to exercise its own allure.

In DEAD CHEEKY at Grant Pirrie in 2005 Quinn abandoned the tape measures and rulers and recovered his passion for scavenging at the Berrimah Tip shop and at Darwin Non Ferrous Metal and the ear splitting pleasures of cutting up old road signs with a drop saw. Quinn studied pure maths and works as a television editor and camera operator so cutting up and reconfiguring road signs has a certain affinity with the geometrical precision of constructing patterns from scraps of found language and unleashed his considerable wit and feel for the telling juxtaposition.

Meanwhile he continued between exhibitions to make garden furniture from found objects - a collection of rusted shovels with the judicious application of the blow torch, pierced eyes, mouths in their concave planes, and made masks of them and a pastoral choir assembled beneath a frangipani tree, while freestyle cut out steel bush chooks roamed the garden. Old chairs and tables were resurfaced with cut up road signs. In NO PAINT, the series of Speed Chairs and the Slow Food table continues that preoccupation.

In NO PAINT, every work is a construction, whether its furniture or stands as a painting, united by a deep attention to the surface and the play of light on it. words, numbers and geometric shapes make patterns and extrude meaning which is often witty but also sublime and abstract in the manner of Colin McCahon or Mondrian. The pitted,scratched, abraded, and pocked surfaces tell of lived history and resistance to entropy. Individual facets are like aerial views of land marked by time and climate. Subtle texture, fading and discolouration produce a softer palette and an elegiac tone, and signal a confidence and maturity in the work, a belief in what the eye has seen being conveyed directly as feeling to the viewer.

Quinn's employment of these "half-destroyed road signs" and depth markers used by engineers to indicate floodway levels might give the appearance of random found objects but it is hard to deny their metaphorical freight as Settler culture constructs to tame and codify the land, to control the map which is already overlaid with other lines, other frames of meaning. By deconstructing them physically, cutting them up and remaking into a new order and focusing on their surface , Quinn draws attention to what lies beneath.

Cleverness and technical achievement gives way to a sensibility that is sensitive to nuance and more expressively exposed. Love My way is both ambiguous and defensively witty but stands as a profound metaphor for the enduring quality of love itself, in all its manifestations. Feeling for the material releases feeling for what has been salvaged and a distinct individual aesthetic is revealed. Paradoxically in NO PAINT, without paint, Quinn comes as a painter for the first time.

#### NOTES

100% TRACY was a Members invitation show based on Cyclone Tracy linked by the use of corrugated iron. It included a signature work Pink window by Rosalie Gascoigne, who visited Darwin and spoke at the gallery and proved a subliminal inspiration for Quinn, to be revealed later on.

TABLEAU IMMEUBLAY was a group show of Darwin Art Furniture makers and included Quinn alongside Don whyte and Franck Gohier

ITERATION and DEAD CHEEKY were joint exhibitions with Quinn's good friend, and fellow furniture maker, Don whyte.

Deconstructing Road signs has featured in the work of other Territory artists Franck Gohier and Chips Mackinolty

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SUZANNE SPUNNER is a playwright and writer on Visual Art who lives in Melbourne. She lived in Darwin for a decade until 1996, and curated TABLEAU IMMEUBLAY. She has been engaged with RAFT ARTSPACE since its inception and has followed the development of Peter Quinn's work with great interest.